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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 001621

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE FOR ISA AFRICA DAS THERESA WHELAN;
STATE FOR AF/DAS DON YAMAMOTO

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MASS](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [DJ](#)

SUBJECT: GUELLEH REQUESTS ON-SITE SURVEY OF PROPOSED CAMP
LEMONIER EXPANSION AREA

REF: A. DJIBOUTI 1542

- [1](#)B. DJIBOUTI 1498
- [1](#)C. DJIBOUTI 934
- [1](#)D. DJIBOUTI 903

Classified By: Ambassador Marguerita Ragsdale.
For reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On December 27, the Ambassador and CJTF-HOA Commanding General Samuel Helland met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ali Abdi Farah, at the Minister's request, to discuss the proposed expansion of Camp Lemonier. The Minister said that Djiboutian President Ismail Omar Guelleh told him to convey a message that the Government of Djibouti (GODj) does not object in principle to the expansion of Camp Lemonier as part of lease negotiations, but that the GODj requires that technicians from the Department of Defense meet technicians from the GODj in/in Djibouti to do a physical survey of the proposed expansion area to avoid confusion over the proposed terrain's perimeter. The Minister also used the opportunity to thank CJTF-HOA for its involvement in civil affairs projects and to request three specific projects for the town of Arta. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) The Ambassador and CJTF-HOA Commanding General Samuel Helland met December 27 with Minister of Foreign Affairs Ali Abdi Farah, at the Minister's request, to discuss the proposed expansion of the territory of Camp Lemonier. No advance information on the purpose of the meeting had been provided. They were joined by the acting Pol/Econ officer (Embassy notetaker) and the Director of Bilateral Relations, Mohamed Ali Hassan (GODj notetaker and translator). The Minister began by stating that he had personally invited the Djiboutian Minister of Defense to join in the meeting, but that he was unable to participate due to another pressing matter.

[1](#)3. (C) The Minister continued that President Ismail Omar Guelleh specifically requested he convey a message that the GODj does not object in principle to the proposed expansion of Camp Lemonier, but that it is necessary that technicians from the U.S. Department of Defense meet technicians from the GODj on the ground in Djibouti to physically walk over the land proposed for the expansion. The Minister said the diagram submitted for the proposed expansion is not enough and that a physical survey is necessary and appropriate for transparency and to avoid misunderstandings over what constitutes the specific plot of land. He said that it does not matter to the GODj whether the technicians come from Washington or if the survey is done by American soldiers already stationed in Djibouti or by appropriate individuals from the Embassy.

[1](#)4. (C) The Minister stressed that the technicians must "see and agree" on the proposed plot of land before the GODj will approve the expansion. He termed it "a question of confidence." He said the land is public property and that the GODj wanted to avoid the type of misunderstanding that happened during previous lease negotiations for Camp Lemonier concerning the Presidential hangar and its surrounding area.

[1](#)5. (C) The Ambassador inquired whether Djibouti's principal negotiator for lease discussions, Ambassador Olhaye in Washington, is aware of this request. The Minister responded that this is a matter that must be taken care of here in Djibouti and that Ambassador Olhaye is not in charge of the "technical side" of the negotiations because he cannot physically survey the land. This should be done in Djibouti. (COMMENT: The Minister never directly said whether or not Olhaye is aware of this request. END COMMENT) The Minister also stated that the President believes such a move is "more transparent" and "more appropriate," so that Djibouti's army can understand the American military requirements and "have confidence."

[1](#)6. (C) The Ambassador told the Minister she will convey the request to Washington, but the decision must be made there, as neither the Embassy nor CJTF-HOA are involved in the negotiations. General Helland concurred, and the Minister said he understood.

17. (C) General Helland stressed to the Minister that there can be only one contact person for the survey, and that the Department of Defense currently considers Ambassador Olhaye to be the contact person for negotiations. The Minister said he will ask the President who should be considered the primary point of contact in Djibouti for the technical survey and will pass the information to the Ambassador by the afternoon of December 27 or the morning of December 28.

18. (C) The Minister expressed President Guelleh's appreciation for the work the American military is doing in Djibouti, especially in its primary task: the struggle against terrorism. The Minister said that the GODj considers this struggle an important stability factor in the Horn of Africa. He said the civil affairs work being done in the districts is a good initiative and is greatly appreciated by the Djiboutian population. He called the school and hospital rehabilitations "fruitful" adding that they "bring together the American military and the Djiboutian people."

19. (C) In addition, the Minister said that during the recent Cabinet meeting led by the President in the town of Arta, the people complained about occasional noise from a nearby joint-use, French-American military training site; however, he said that overall the people of Arta were appreciative of the American civil affairs efforts in the town and are more comfortable with the American military presence following these projects. The Minister said he wanted to seize the opportunity posed by the General's presence to request three specific projects for Arta: a small incinerator similar to the one installed at Doudah; a small ambulance; and a fence around a primary school in the town.

110. (C) The General told the Minister it is a honor and pleasure to be a guest in Djibouti and praised the work of Generals Fathi and Zacharia as interlocutors with CJTF-HOA. The said he looks forward to continuing to work with the GODj.

111. (C) The Ambassador expressed her appreciation for CJTF-HOA's help to the Embassy and to Djibouti, and told the Minister that she hopes that base negotiations will be quickly and satisfactorily concluded.

112. (C) COMMENT: The request by President Guelleh, through his Minister of Foreign Affairs, for a technical survey reflects, in Post's view, the Djiboutian military's lack of confidence in the capacity of Ambassador Olhaye to represent fully their interests in the current round of base negotiations. While it is a problem in need of an internal fix, it has reverberations for the U.S. The Djiboutian military does not want "misunderstandings" of lease and base details. There is an inexact understanding of the specifics of the volume of land the U.S. is requesting -- maps, diagrams and coordinates notwithstanding. The GODj wants the land "walked off" (in simple terms), so that there is clarity about what areas the Department of Defense envisions a future Camp Lemonnier encompassing. END COMMENT.
RAGSDALE